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From: William T Fujioka  
Chief Executive Officer

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### IMPLEMENTING THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES APPROACH – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOS ANGELES COUNTY

On March 29, 2011, your Board adopted the updated Child Care Policy Framework and directed the Office of Child Care to report back on various topics. This report addresses how the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (IDCFS) and partner organizations implemented the Strengthening Families approach to reduce child abuse and neglect.

Convened by IDCFS, Strengthening Families Illinois (SFI) includes over 40 State and community partners. SFI has been in place since 2005 and has amassed a number of significant accomplishments. This report focuses on four areas of particular interest for stakeholders in Los Angeles County:

- School Readiness Initiative – Recognizing the importance of being ready for school and the particular challenges that young children in the child welfare system face, IDCFS defined “early education” as an entitlement for all three to five year old children in foster care. Current practice is to ensure that every child between three to five years of age in foster care is enrolled and attending a high quality early learning program.
- SFI Learning Networks – Over 100 child development centers are involved in ongoing professional development designed to improve their services to children

*“To Enrich Lives Through Effective And Caring Service”*

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and families. Many of these trainings are designed to accommodate both child welfare caseworkers and child development program staff.

- Parent Leadership in Communities – SFI enlisted an advertising firm to work with parents to translate the Protective Factors into “straightforward language.” The five Protective Factors are positive attributes which, when present, are linked to lower incidence of child abuse and neglect. The effort to tailor the messages to parents contributed to the successful engagement of parents through the SFI Parent Cafés.
- Family Advocacy Centers – IDCFS has funded 14 community based organizations to empower and support families as they navigate the child welfare system.

These programs are explored more fully in the attached document.

The Strengthening Families approach has succeeded in reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect. This approach holds promise for the children and families in Los Angeles County.

Section F of the attached report includes five recommendations for how Los Angeles County could begin the process of integrating this approach into the practice models of selected County departments and guide our work with community partners.

Should your staff have questions regarding the content of the report, they can contact Kathy House, Assistant Chief Executive Officer, at (213) 974-4530.

WTF:KH  
LB:KMS:eb

Attachments

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors  
County Counsel

## **Strengthening Families Illinois: Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Los Angeles County**

### **A. Introduction**

In 2010, the Illinois Department of Children and Families (IDCFS) fielded 109,186 reports of child abuse. Investigations of those reports revealed credible evidence of abuse or neglect in 28,968 cases. The volume of this caseload – which is comparable to that managed by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services – represents incalculable trauma to thousands of young children and their families, a significant cost to the public sector, and a challenging work load for IDCFS.

Mr. Erwin McEwen, Director of IDCFS, is committed to changing the reality and the perception of IDCFS from the entity “that takes your kids away” to an organization that can “help and support parents who are stressed and struggling to meet the needs of their children”.<sup>1</sup> In his remarks to the Strengthening Families Leadership Summit, Mr. McEwen stated:

“DCFS should not be in the business of raising children, but in the business of strengthening families.”<sup>2</sup>

The process of transforming IDCFS has involved community partners and parents, and has been guided by the principles of the Strengthening Families approach and the promotion of the Protective Factors.

The Strengthening Families approach caught the attention of Illinois and 36 other states, as well as philanthropic organizations, public and community-based service providers in Los Angeles County. The LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment is a champion of Strengthening Families. First 5 LA adopted the Strengthening Families approach prior to implementing its Partnerships for Families (PFF) initiative and has actively incorporated these principles and activities into its strategies for preventing child maltreatment. The Strengthening Families approach has influenced the work of the Education Coordinating Council, most notably the Council’s focus on early childhood education. The Magnolia Place Community Initiative is “designed to nurture the child, strengthen the family and build a caring community.”<sup>3</sup> Within a number of County departments, the Strengthening Families approach is informing the design and implementation of services.

Could service providers in Los Angeles County realize better outcomes by making an intentional commitment to integrate the Strengthening Families approach into their work with children, families and communities? The goals outlined by Strengthening Families Illinois and the lessons learned over the past six years suggest that substantial and positive change is possible when the public, private and philanthropic sectors work collaboratively to integrate the Strengthening Families approach into their practice models.

This document begins with a brief description of the Strengthening Families approach. The next section describes how IDCFS, in collaboration with community partners, integrated the Strengthening Families approach into four program areas. The final section is devoted to recommendations for integrating the Strengthening Families approach into our work with children and families in Los Angeles County.

## **B. What is the Strengthening Families Approach?**

The Strengthening Families approach was developed by the Center for Study of Social Policy (CSSP) as a feasible, systematic way to impact large numbers of children and families before abuse or neglect occurred. In 2001, Strengthening Families was launched with an emphasis on early care and education programs, building on that sector's relationships with both children and families. Since then, Strengthening Families' partners have expanded in both number and type of organization.

As a result of their research and conversations with practitioners in child welfare, family support and early childhood, CSSP identified five positive attributes - referred to as Protective Factors - which are linked to lower incidence of child abuse and neglect. The Protective Factors are:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Children's social and emotional development

Research has demonstrated that when these Protective Factors are present and robust, the occurrence of child abuse and neglect is significantly reduced. By providing parents with "what they need to parent effectively, even under stress," the Protective Factors help keep families strong. This strategy for dealing with child neglect and abuse shows great promise because:

- It works.
- It is cost effective. Activities that build the Protective Factors can be incorporated into existing programs and systems - such as early childhood education and child welfare, at little cost.
- There is high interest in preventing abuse. A National Association for the Education of Young Children survey showed that 97 percent of responding programs wanted to do more to prevent child maltreatment.<sup>4</sup>

## **C. Strengthening Families Illinois (SFI)**

In 2004, CSPP solicited proposals from states throughout the country to pilot Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education, a child abuse prevention strategy based on the Protective Factors. Proposals from Illinois and six other states were selected. In 2005, the IDCFS convened more than 20 collaborative partner organizations and state agencies, child welfare, child abuse prevention, family support, early childhood education as well as parents and community leaders to promote the protective factors across systems and settings. Now known as Strengthening Families Illinois (SFI), the collaboration has doubled in size, drawing members from over 40 agencies, State departments and parent leaders. The collaboration continues to be chaired by the director of IDCFS and its work is currently guided by the Strengthening Families Illinois Strategic Plan 2009-2014.

The overall purpose of SFI is to prevent child abuse and neglect and to promote the health and well-being of children and families by working with child care centers and child welfare agency staff to incorporate evidence-based protective factors in early childhood services and systems statewide.

Collaborative partners advance the mission of SFI by:

- Incorporating the Strengthening Families approach into their work;
- Contributing financial resources to the collaboration;
- Promoting an understanding of the Strengthening Families approach through their communications including but not limited to publications and conferences; and
- Dedicating staff time to serve on the SFI Leadership Team and various workgroups.

SFI structure includes a Leadership Team, Work Groups, and the full collaborative. The Strengthening Families Leadership Team is chaired by the Director of IDCFS and consists of one executive level representative from each of the partner organizations, the chairs of Strengthening Families Work Groups, senior staff of DCFS, the lead from each of the pilot sites, and five parent representatives.

The following offers a brief description of the SFI Work Groups:

- *Building Resiliency Work Group*

This Work Group advises and supports SFI on building the capacity of early childhood centers to effectively address mental health issues in children and adults, to mitigate the impact of trauma on young children, and to promote children's social and emotional well-being. In addition, this Work Group has been key to integrating the building resiliency efforts of SFI, IDCFS, and the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership.

The recommendation to add a sixth Protective Factor on Healthy Parent Child Relationships emerged from this Work Group, as did support for the development of the "Understanding Trauma and Children's Exposure to Violence" curriculum.

- *Evaluation Work Group*

This Work Group is charged with documenting the impact of the Strengthening Families approach on childcare centers, child welfare agency staff, and families. Among its accomplishments are the development of Learning Network reporting forms, and staff and parent questionnaires. SFI Parent Café evaluations show very positive responses, with 99 percent of participants reporting that the cafes were helpful and 87 percent indicating the intent to change their behavior based on information shared at a Parent Café.

This Work Group is currently assessing the impact of SFI on early childhood centers.

- *Professional Development and Training Work Group*

The Professional Development Work Group advises and supports SFI by developing high quality professional development topics that support the implementation of Strengthening Families. Recognizing both the importance of collaboration between the child welfare and early learning communities, and the need for participants from each discipline to learn about the other, the Professional Development and Training Work Group recommended that training be developed to deal specifically with the importance of collaborative relationships. Most SFI training sessions are designed to accommodate persons from both disciplines. Attachment I includes examples of two SFI training descriptions provided by the Midwest Learning Center for Family Support.

This Work Group also advises SFI on the accessibility of training opportunities for early childhood professionals, child welfare staff, and parents; offers guidance to the Midwest Learning Center for Family Support as they develop SFI training modules; and contribute to the quality assurance system for SFI training.

#### **D. Impact of SFI on Policies and Practices**

The implementation of SFI has triggered policy and practice changes within IDCFS and among SFI partners. This section summarizes four areas where change has occurred, including:

1. **School Readiness Approach** involves a policy change within IDCFS and increased collaboration with early education sector;
2. **SFI Learning Networks** include early education programs that have made a substantial commitment to ongoing professional development and collaboration with IDCFS;
3. **Parent Leadership in Communities** changes how SFI partners engage with parents and the role of parents working with SFI partners;
4. **Family Advocacy Centers**, while funded by IDCFS, have empowered families as they navigate the child welfare system.

The scope of SFI is far broader than these four areas. The following is intended to highlight the impact of SFI on various stakeholders and the depth of the collaboration makes this approach so exciting.

##### **1. School Readiness Initiative**

Illinois was the first state in the country to require that all children between three and five years of age in the foster care system be enrolled in and attend a quality early learning program. This mandate for early education set IDCFS apart from most jurisdictions, the policy and planning decisions leading to its implementation were as innovative as the mandate.

IDCFS redefined early education as an “educational entitlement” for young children rather than a support service for employed foster parents. As such, enrollment has been targeted to Head Start, Pre-K and nationally accredited early care and education programs. These programs tend to be better equipped to promote school readiness among young children, including those who have experienced the trauma of abuse and/or neglect. It should be noted that the IDCFS

definition of “school readiness” was framed broadly and included “the social, emotional and cognitive well being of young children.”

IDCFS also recognized that the benefits of high quality early education are achieved when participation is stable and consistent over time. Therefore, caseworkers are urged to consider sustaining the child’s participation in the early education program when changes in foster care placement or permanency surface. When change is absolutely necessary, caseworkers and teachers are expected to assist children with the transition process.

Once early education became a required component of the IDCFS service plan for children between three and five years of age, caseworkers were responsible for children being enrolled in and attending such programs. “Does Not Apply” is no longer an acceptable entry in the education field of a young child’s service plan.

Child welfare agencies and the early childhood community began shifting their practices well before the mandate was announced. In fact, the following activities were undertaken to build support for the early education mandate:

1. All deputy directors were engaged and support was enlisted to promote the importance of the early education message.
2. A needs assessment was conducted to determine what frontline caseworkers needed to place children in quality early education programs.
3. The child welfare training department was enlisted to develop desk aids, an implementation manual and related training.
4. Key messages and documents regarding the importance of early education were developed and disseminated by IDCFS internally and to foster parents.
5. State child care, Head Start and Education departments drafted guidelines for caseworkers to facilitate the placement of children in high quality early education programs.
6. Early education was added as a component of the education passport for foster children.
7. Stakeholders in the early education community were engaged and introduced to the IDCFS role as “parent” for wards and the intent to enroll children in high quality early education programs.
8. Collaborative agreements were established with Head Start and other high quality early learning programs to ensure children in the foster care system from birth to five had access and could be enrolled.
9. Foster parent councils were engaged and information of the importance of early education was shared. Potential problem areas such as transportation, scheduling, etc. were addressed.

By December 2004 when the Director of IDCFS announced that, within one year, all three to five year olds in foster care would be enrolled in high quality early education programs, the goal

was achievable. Front line workers had both the administrative tools and relationships with early learning programs needed to facilitate enrollment. Despite the shortage of subsidized spaces, caseworkers were largely successful in enrolling their young clients in high quality early education programs.

This work continues and is reflected in the SFI 2009-2014 Strategic Plan. In addition to ensuring that 100 percent of children in the foster care system attend quality early learning programs, Program Level Outcomes include:

1. Increase the number of early childhood providers incorporating Strengthening Families
2. Caseworkers and early childhood program staff collaborate in service planning for children in the child welfare system

The SFI Project Director described IDCFS' success at enrolling preschool age foster children in high quality early education programs. She noted however, that the IDCFS and SFI are still struggling with how to best serve infants and toddlers in the child welfare system. While the primary developmental task for this age group is bonding and attachment, young children in the child welfare system are also faced with the impact of trauma.

## **2. SFI Learning Networks**

Six SFI Learning Networks were launched between 2005 and 2006. Each network included an early education center that served as the "hub" with seven to ten early childhood education centers participating in the network. By 2010, the number of Networks had increased to 14; and over 100 early childhood programs were participating in networks throughout Illinois. The SFI Learning Networks are the mechanism used to embed the Strengthening Families approach in early education programs, to promote ongoing collaboration with local child welfare staff, and to increase parent engagement.

SFI Learning Network members participate in training and professional development opportunities and monthly peer to peer network meetings, complete the Strengthening Families self assessment, and develop action plans to help strengthen their practice and strategies focused on building strong relationships with parents.

## **3. Parent Leadership in Communities**

The *Love Is Not Enough* (LINE) campaign is a parent-led effort aimed at keeping families strong. The campaign, which is sponsored by SFI, addresses the challenges that confront parents and offers a variety of ways for parents to connect, share ideas and get involved. While the campaign advances an understanding of the protective factors, parents advising the project believed that information on the protective factors needed to be communicated in more straightforward language. Better World Advertising worked with parents to "translate" the Protective Factors. The following chart shows the LINE campaign messages and the corresponding Protective Factors.



Love is Not Enough (LINE) Campaign Messages	Protective Factors
Be strong and flexible	Parental Resilience
Parents need friends	Social Connections
Being a great parent is part natural and part learned	Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
We all need help sometimes	Concrete Support in Times of Need
Parents need to help their children communicate	Social and Emotional Competence of Children
Give your children the love and respect they need	Healthy Parent – Child Relationships

The LINE campaign uses Parent Cafés to connect with parents, foster friendships, and introduce the Protective Factors. Building on the World Café model,<sup>5</sup> Parent Cafés aim to tap into the collective wisdom available in every community to support parents and prevent child abuse and neglect. Conducted in a safe and supportive environment, all participants are encouraged to contribute to the conversation and to listen as others share their insights. Recent Parent Cafés were conducted as a series of three sessions:

- Parent Café 1 – Taking Care of Yourself
- Parent Café 2 – Being a Strong Parent
- Parent Café 3 – Building a Strong Relationship with Your Children

SFI reports that more than 87 percent of Parent Café participants have reported learning something about each of the Protective Factors and intend to change their behavior based on that information.<sup>6</sup> Parent Cafés are frequently a parent's first formal contact with SFI. Parents may choose to participate in one or more Parent Cafés, pursue training to serve as a Parent Café Host, engage as a SFI Active Parent Leader or become a part of the SFI Core Parent Leadership. SFI also invites parents to be a part of the Keep Your Family Strong online Facebook community.

Ongoing work in this area is reflected in the SFI 2009-2014 Strategic Plan. Goal 3 states, "Promote Parent Leadership in Family-Serving Systems." Program level outcomes related to this goal include:

1. 1,000 parent leaders in regional networks are trained to deliver SFI LINE Parent Cafés and parent leadership training; and
2. Providers are fostering parent leadership intentionally.

#### **4. Family Advocacy Centers**

In 2004, IDCFS established the first Family Advocacy Center (FAC) in Bloomington, Illinois. The purpose of this FAC is to provide advocacy and support to parents outside of the formal child welfare system. IDCFS recognized that community-based organizations are well

positioned to reach families before they come into the child welfare system and are often better able to establish trusting relationships with families involved in the system.

Today, there are 15 FACs operating throughout the state. FACs are located in areas with the highest IDCFS intake rates and are operated by a variety of community and/or faith-based organizations. The following chart is an example of an organization serving as a FAC.

<b>Family Advocacy in Champaign County</b>	
<p align="center"><b>Mission Statement</b></p> <p>To empower families through advocacy to understand their role and responsibilities in the child welfare system. To engage families in active participation in service interventions so families can obtain the necessary skills to build stronger families.</p> <p>To provide families with assistance on how to navigate through the child welfare system and empower them to become the driving force in their case.</p> <p>It is our belief with this power shift, families will be respected as the change agent on their case and ultimately the change agent in their lives.</p>	
Services provided by Family Advocacy in Champaign County include:	
Child Welfare Advocacy	Professional Mentoring
Mediation	Workshops
Community Outreach	Education Equity
Health Promotion	Strategic Planning

#### **E. IDCFS and SFI**

IDCFS and SFI share a commitment to the Strengthening Families approach. IDCFS has worked diligently to embed the Protective Factors into its system. SFI has focused its efforts on embedding the Strengthening Families approach in the early childhood sector and engaging parents in this process. The success of this collaboration appears related to the participants' efforts to keep the focus on protecting children by strengthening and supporting families.

IDCFS has continued to refine its practice model to include Trauma-Informed, Strengths-Based, Family-Centered Practice. The Strengthening Families approach and promotion of the Protective Factors has contributed to and supported this evolution.

#### **F. Implementing SF in Los Angeles County**

IDCFS and Strengthening Families Illinois have made substantial progress in integrating the Strengthening Families approach and the Protective Factors into their work with children and families. Clearly some aspects of SFI could – with sufficient will – be replicated wholesale in Los Angeles County. Other aspects will require modifications to reflect our geography, population, political realities and provider communities. The most important lesson that SFI offers is - that with hard work and strong leadership – change is possible.

#### **Recommendations for Consideration by Your Board:**

▪ ***Integrating the Strengthening Families Approach into Our Work***

1. Direct the Policy Roundtable for Child Care (Roundtable) and the Chief Executive Office to serve as the contact point for County efforts to integrate Strengthening Families into their work with children, families and communities.
2. Instruct the County departments represented on the Roundtable to integrate Strengthening Families into their work with children and families, within existing resources, and to report their progress to the Roundtable for inclusion in the regularly scheduled Roundtable reports to the Board.

The following departments are represented on the Roundtable:

- Chief Executive Office
  - Children and Family Services
  - Mental Health
  - Parks and Recreation
  - Public Health
  - Public Social Services
  - Probation
3. Charge the Roundtable and CEO to work collaboratively with other established or emerging Strengthening Families efforts within the County including the Education Coordinating Council (ECC), LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment, Magnolia Place and First 5 LA.

▪ ***Communicating the Strengthening Families Message***

4. Direct Roundtable members to work collaboratively with the CEO Public Affairs and Multimedia, Cable and Telecommunications Offices, and where possible, philanthropic organizations to:
  - Craft consistent Strengthening Families messages for use across departments, and
  - Explore how social media and innovative technologies can assist County departments in communicating with client families.

▪ ***Changing Practice***

5. Encourage County departments working with children and families who are living in poverty, exposed to mental health issues, and/or under the child welfare system to mitigate these risk factors by promoting participation in high quality early education programs.
  - a. Direct the Roundtable, ECC, DCFS and representatives of the early education community to develop a plan to target the enrollment of at least 90 percent of young DCFS children under the age of six—and the children of DCFS and probation youth—in high-quality, subsidized early care and education programs where space is available by the close of 2014. This plan will necessarily include

strategies to maximize the use of subsidized child development services available in the County.

- b. Request the ECC to support DCFS efforts to enroll young children under their supervision in high quality early learning programs by:
  - i. Working with DCFS to modify caregiver agreements, where possible, to include a requirement to enroll children in high quality early education programs.
  - ii. Working with the Dependency Court to encourage that Court Minute Orders related to children between three and five years of age include enrollment in high quality early education programs.
- c. Instruct the Roundtable to convene representatives of DCFS, ECC, early childhood programs, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Zero to Three, WestEd, and the Children's Court to develop policy recommendations to guide the use of early education services for children birth to three years of age. These recommendations will be included in the July 2012 Roundtable report to the Board of Supervisors.
- d. Direct DPSS to ensure that families receiving CalWORKs Stage 1 Child Care are informed of the importance of early education and the full range of child development programs.
- e. Direct DPSS, the Roundtable and the local child care resource and referral agencies to develop strategies to inform families exempted from CalWORKs work requirements because of the age or number of young children in the family, of the subsidized child development programs for which their children may be eligible.

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<sup>1</sup> Erwin McEwen, "Strengthening Families Leadership Summit-Los Angeles," November 10, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., McEwen, November 10, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Children's Bureau discussion of its child abuse prevention initiatives at <http://www.all4kids.org/prevention.html>.

<sup>4</sup> About Strengthening Families, is available at <http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net/index.php/about>.

<sup>5</sup> Information on the World Café and the Café process is available at <http://www.theworldcafe.com>.

<sup>6</sup> Illinois: State Approach Profile, Center for the Study of Social Policy at [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net).

# Los Angeles County Child Care Policy Framework 2011- 2013

## Promoting Healthy Children, Strong Families and Vibrant Communities

The *Los Angeles County Child Care Policy Framework (Policy Framework) 2011-2013* reaffirms the commitment of the Board of Supervisors (Board), County departments and community stakeholders to close the gap between what we **know** and what we **do** to support the healthy development of young children, their families, and our communities.<sup>1</sup>

Despite significant budget challenges in the last few years, implementation of the original Child Care Policy Framework<sup>2</sup>, adopted by the Board of Supervisors on January 6, 2009, resulted in significant accomplishments by several departments, a deeper understanding of ongoing challenges and a host of lessons learned; however, much work remains. The *Child Care Policy Framework 2011-2013* builds on those successes, shared learning across departments, community-based agencies and clients, and seeks to engage new partners who share the vision of promoting healthy children, strong families, and vibrant communities.

### Goals for 2011-2013

1. The quality of child development services for children birth to five years of age in Los Angeles County will be improved as the Steps to Excellence Project (STEP) is expanded and support services to STEP participants are intensified. *Why? The quality of care impacts early brain development.*
2. Utilization of local, State, and Federal child development resources will be maximized. All available resources and policies will help strengthen the child development infrastructure and support the expansion of high quality child development programs that integrate family support, health, mental health and other relevant services. *Why? Financial and regulatory support is needed from all sectors.*
3. County departments will work collaboratively with each other and community partners to maximize the utilization of available child development resources, support quality improvements and promote the delivery of integrated services for children and their families. *Why? The most vulnerable children need assistance to access services.*
4. County departments will work collaboratively with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), key school districts and community-based child development services to integrate services, thereby supporting effective:
  - a. articulation between child development and kindergarten, including approaches to effectively engage parents in the education of their children;
  - b. design of developmentally appropriate transitional kindergarten programs; and
  - c. identification and/or utilization of new or nontraditional funding for child development services such as, but not limited to, Federal Title 1 funds, to serve special populations. *Why? County departments are critical to providing integrated services for families*
5. The Chief Executive Office (CEO) will facilitate County department efforts to work internally, across departments, and with community partners, to integrate the Strengthening Families Approach (SFA) and Protective Factors into their work with children, families and communities; and engage families in high quality child development services. The CEO, with assistance from the Center for the Study of Social Policy and key local partners, will establish a multidisciplinary SFA learning community designed to support ongoing professional development and SFA projects that are underway or emerging in County departments. *Why? To ensure quality and consistent services.*

<sup>1</sup> Issue addressed by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child in *The Science of Early Childhood Development*, (2007)  
<http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>.

<sup>2</sup> The original Child Care Policy Framework is available for review at [www.childcare.lacounty.gov](http://www.childcare.lacounty.gov).

## What We Know

Building on our collective experiences – we know that:

- Families must be active partners in determining which services and/or supports they need.
- Services and supports from multiple County departments and community-based agencies are frequently required to strengthen families and ensure the safe and healthy development of young children.
- Providing families with the services they need - when they need them - becomes significantly more difficult when County departments and community stakeholders attempt to work across disciplines with related but distinct goals, using different funding sources and their respective requirements.
- While these hurdles are sometimes overcome by valiant individual efforts, they should be systemically addressed by policies, systems and supports that bridge initiatives using common language and goals.
- A number of County departments, community stakeholders, and local philanthropies including First 5 LA and the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment are rethinking their practice models to align with the SFA. This approach seeks to engage the programs, services, and systems that are already supporting and working with children and families as partners in preventing maltreatment and promoting optimal development.
- The Protective Factors are the foundation of the SFA. Research indicates that when these factors are present and robust in families, the likelihood of child abuse, juvenile delinquency, school failure and poor connection to the labor market diminishes.

A Publication of the Office of Child Care  
Within the Service Integration Branch of the Chief Executive Office

The Protective Factors are:

- Parental Resilience
  - Social Connections
  - Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
  - Concrete Supports in Times of Need
  - Children's Social and Emotional Competence<sup>3</sup>
- Adopting the SFA, along with an action plan to speed implementation, will provide County departments, community-based agencies, local school districts and philanthropic organizations a common language to bridge a variety of disciplines. In addition, families working with these entities will be engaged in intentional partnerships aimed at promoting the optimum development of their children.



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<sup>3</sup> ***“Small but significant changes that strengthen families and prepare children for success,”*** page 2, Center for the Study of Social Policy, [www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org).

## What We Will Do

**GOAL ONE:** The quality of child development services in Los Angeles County will be improved as the Steps to Excellence Project (STEP) is expanded and support services to STEP participants are intensified.

### Lessons Learned 2009 - 2011:

Research has demonstrated that high quality child development services can generate substantial benefits compared to costs,<sup>4</sup> contribute to significant reductions in child abuse and juvenile delinquency,<sup>5</sup> and narrow the achievement gap.<sup>6</sup> These laudable results are however, limited to high quality programs. Unfortunately, both national and local research has consistently documented that the majority of child development services offer mediocre quality. Programs with mediocre quality do not produce strong child outcomes.

STEP is a locally developed child care quality rating and support program administered by the Office of Child Care (OCC). STEP focuses on licensed child development centers and family child care homes serving children from birth to six years old and was launched in Los Angeles County in 2007. Currently, over 400 child development programs, representing 62 percent of the original recruitment goal, are enrolled in STEP and more than 1,500 early educators have participated in STEP trainings

<sup>4</sup> Kilburn, M. Rebecca, Karoly, Lynn A., *The Economics of Early Childhood Policy: What the Dismal Science Has to Say About Investing in Children* (2008) RAND. Per this analysis, the Perry Preschool generated a benefit of \$17.07 for each \$1 invested and the Chicago Child Parent Centers generated a benefit of \$7.14 for each \$1 invested.

<sup>5</sup> Reynolds, Arthur J., Temple, Judy A., Robertson, Dylan L., Mann, Emily A., *Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Center Program Executive Summary*, (2001). Participants in the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program experienced a 51 percent reduction in child maltreatment, a 33 percent lower rate of juvenile arrest, and a 42 percent reduction in arrest for a violent offense.

<sup>6</sup> Karoly, Lynn, Zellman, Gail, Li, Jennifer, *Promoting Effective Preschool Programs* (2009).  
A Publication of the Office of Child Care  
Within the Service Integration Branch of the Chief Executive Office

or received technical assistance. As of June 2010, 160 child development programs were rated by STEP. These ratings revealed that the majority of programs (83 percent) scored a “3” or below on the STEP rating scale. This indicates that most programs are meeting a minimal threshold in terms of the quality of services being provided.<sup>7</sup> Children and families throughout Los Angeles County would benefit from a substantial improvement in child care program quality.

### Strategies for 2011-2013:

- Expand STEP to additional communities.
- Expand STEP’s on-site coaching.
- Link STEP participants to County resources so they can offer families “concrete supports in times of need”.

### Partners and Commitments for 2011-2013:

- Implement agreement with Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to support and process 50+ Early Education Centers in STEP during FY 2010-11.
- Implement agreement with Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) to expand STEP to additional communities.
- Work with child care resource and referral agencies to expand on-site coaching.
- Work with the Department of Public Health to research nutrition, activity standards, and obesity prevention for inclusion in the STEP rating matrix and training activities.

#### Success Story

“Thanks STEP for helping our center with funding to enhance our inside and outside environments, and providing staff with professional development support that has improved our service delivery to the children and families in our community.”

Maxine Higa, Salvation Army  
South Los Angeles Child Development Center

<sup>7</sup> STEP Annual Report, 2011.



**GOAL TWO:** Local, State and Federal policies and budgets will strengthen the child development infrastructure and support the expansion of high quality child development programs that integrate family support, health, mental health and other relevant services into their operations.

### Lessons Learned 2009 - 2011:

Both the State and Federal governments play a critical role in funding subsidized child development services. Los Angeles County has the capacity to act both in Sacramento and Washington D.C. Ensuring access to high quality child development services is consistent with meeting County Strategic Plan Goal 2 “Child, Family and Adult Well-Being: Enrich lives through integrated, cost-effective and client-centered supportive services.”

There is a need for a strong, unified voice including parents and a range of stakeholders, to effectively advocate for the expansion of child development services. In addition, coordination at the County level can help to maximize the utilization of all available resources.

The ability to impact policies related to child development services are enhanced when families are full partners in the process and local stakeholders, both traditional and non-tradition, work toward common goals.

### Strategies for 2011-2013:

The OCC, working in conjunction with the CEO Intergovernmental and External Affairs (IGEA) and the Policy Roundtable for Child Care (Roundtable), will continue efforts to enlist public and private sector partners to aggressively advocate for the continuation and/or expansion of funding for high quality, comprehensive services which ensures the safety of children, promotes school success, strong families and communities. At the same time, the OCC and Roundtable will expand efforts to assure that all available resources are used to benefit families and children. A decades-long pattern of returning available

funds and under-utilization of existing capacity must be addressed. The OCC and Roundtable will lead efforts to develop a countywide mechanism to track use of existing capacity. Other specific actions will include informing members of the Los Angeles County Legislative Delegation of the need to restore or maintain funding to:

- California Department of Education/Child Development Division (CDE/CDD) Programs, and
- Child development infrastructure including but not limited to local child care planning councils, child care resource and referral services, and Community Care Licensing.

Similar efforts will be engaged at the local level to enlist public and private sector partners to advocate for local support of services that ensure the safety of children, promote school success and strong families. Activities will include:

- Work with local philanthropic organizations to develop a “Bridge Funding” mechanism to assist State funded child development programs during times of State Budget stalemates.
- Work with First 5 LA and the local child development community to ensure both targeted and countywide support for high quality child development services.

#### **A Success Story (Under the Circumstances)**

Despite experiencing the worst budget crisis in recent history, child development and other service providers stood together in opposition to Governor Schwarzenegger’s budget for 2010-11. This unified front fueled the Legislature’s refusal to accept the Governor’s proposal to eliminate funding for the CalWORKs Program and most State funding for child development services.



## Partners and Commitments for 2011-2013:

- Consistent with Board adopted policies, the CEO IGEA and County departments will continue to advocate to maintain and expand high quality child development services for children and families in Los Angeles County.
- OCC will work with a range of external advocacy partners to maintain and expand high quality child development services for children and families in Los Angeles County. Partners will include but not be limited to the Advancement Project, First 5 LA, Los Angeles County Office of Education - Head Start (LACOE-HS), LAUP, LAUSD, and Preschool California.



## Challenges Ahead

California's budget crisis presents serious challenges to the well-being of children and their families. The California Budget Project has noted the following issues:

- California workers and their families face the toughest job market in decades, battered by the longest and most severe national recession in the post-World War II era.
- Millions of low- and middle-income Californians are struggling to make ends meet in the face of job loss or reduced hours of work.
- Consequently, more of California's families are turning to public programs such as Food Stamps, Healthy Families, Medi-Cal, and CalWORKs for assistance.
- Increased demand for public programs comes at a time when recent budgets have made deep cuts to health and human services programs and the Governor has proposed more reductions to close the state's budget gap.<sup>8</sup>

Governor Brown's proposed budget for 2011-2012 includes further cuts to human services. Families in need of subsidized child development services may be facing a smaller pool of subsidized programs, higher parent fees, shorter periods of assistance, and lower income ceilings. "Infrastructure" supports such as Community Care Licensing, local child care planning councils, child care worker retention services, training and support are also facing serious reductions or complete elimination.

<sup>8</sup> California Budget Project, *Proposed Budget Cuts Come at a Time of Growing Need*. (February 2010) [www.cbp.org](http://www.cbp.org).

**GOAL Three:** County departments will work collaboratively with each other and with community partners to maximize the utilization of child development resources and promote the delivery of integrated family support services. Particular emphasis will be placed on connecting the following populations to child development resources and when appropriate, early intervention services:

- **CalWORKs families who are homeless and have young children.**
- **Children under the supervision of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Probation Department, including those in foster care, kin care, and with their families.**
- **Teen parents under the jurisdiction of DCFS and/or the Probation Department.**

#### **Lessons Learned 2009 - 2011:**

The “subsidized child care system” is, in reality, a complicated conglomeration of programs serving specific age groups, during specific times, with different funding sources and different eligibility requirements. The current array of child development services are a reflection of available resources – not necessarily family needs. High quality child development programs with the option of full-day, full-year services for children across age groups are in short supply.

We know that the demand for subsidized child development services far exceeds the supply – currently, over 29,000 income eligible children in Los Angeles County are waiting for a space to become available.<sup>9</sup> We know that young children and families in stressful circumstances benefit from access to high quality child development services with stable and nurturing relationships. We know that access to such services can reduce incidents of abuse and neglect, or mitigate the long term impacts of trauma on children who experience abuse

and/or neglect. We know that children in families coping with homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health issues are among the most vulnerable and have the potential to reap significant benefits from participating in high quality child development services. Unfortunately, these children are among the least likely to access such services. In order to promote connections to child development services, Los Angeles County departments will work to identify vulnerable families with young children who are in need of child development services and will inform these families of local child development resources.

Additional resources are needed to support programs designed to meet the needs of low income working families as well as families dealing with additional challenges. New strategies are needed to ensure that the most vulnerable children and families are able to participate in high quality child development services.

#### **Success Stories**

**A** unique collaboration was launched between the LACOE-HS and the DCFS in 2009. DCFS piloted a variety of Head Start enrollment drives and found that DCFS Children's Services Workers were more likely to promote the use of child development services and foster families were more likely to enroll children when the application process was significantly streamlined. As a result of these “enrollment drives”, 197 children in foster care were connected to local Head Start programs that were prepared to enroll and serve them.

**LACOE-HS** also collaborated with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS). DPSS distributed LACOE – HS recruitment flyers to clients with age eligible young children. The opportunities for further collaboration have expanded as Head Start and Early Head Start have identified homeless children as priority populations for their services.

<sup>9</sup> Data from the Los Angeles County Centralized Eligibility List as of December 2010.  
A Publication of the Office of Child Care  
Within the Service Integration Branch of the Chief Executive Office

## Strategies:

- OCC will work with County departments, child development program operators, child care resource and referral agencies and community stakeholders to develop strategies to make the subsidized child development system more accessible to vulnerable children and families in Los Angeles County.
- OCC, in collaboration with the Department of Parks and Recreation and the County Library, will convene a forum with after school community-based providers to identify opportunities to increase the enrollment of DCFS and Probation youth in safe and educationally enriching activities during non-school hours.
- OCC, in conjunction with DCFS, will convene child care resource and referral agencies and child development stakeholders to explore possible collaborative efforts to include child development personnel in Team Decision Making conferences.
- Building on the successful DCFS-LACOE HS collaboration, DPSS will launch a targeted outreach effort aimed at CalWORKs participants with young children who are experiencing homelessness.
- The Roundtable will assist DCFS in promoting, among Children's Services Workers, an understanding of the lifelong impacts of early brain development including cognitive, emotional and physical well being.
- DCFS and Probation will be introduced to their child care resource and referral agency and assisted in enrolling their children in child development services prior to their leaving the child welfare system.
- The Roundtable will convene members representing DPSS, LACOE-HS, Long Beach Unified School District Head Start Programs, Regional Centers and Children Today, as well as other stakeholders, for the purpose of 1) exploring the unique array of services available to families with young children in Long Beach who are experiencing homelessness, substance abuse, domestic violence and/or mental health issues, and 2) creating opportunities to replicate similar service systems in other parts of Los Angeles County.
- The ICAN (Interagency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect) Task Force on Pregnant and Parenting Teen will review materials developed by the OCC which are intended to facilitate the enrollment of teen parents and their children in high quality child development services and assist with the distribution of these materials.
- The Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles and the University of Southern California – School of Social Work will pursue the development of an intern program for Social Work graduate students. As currently conceived, interns would be stationed at local child care resource and referral agencies. As their understanding of the child development and family support service sector grows, they will guide families identified by specific County departments through the child development referral process, interfacing as needed with the County department.

## Partners and Commitments for 2011-2013:

- Working in conjunction with the child care resource and referral agencies, DCFS will expand its "enrollment drives," to include LAUP and California State Preschool Programs.
- Transition Age Youth who are teen parents and teen parents who are clients of both



**GOAL FOUR:** County departments will work collaboratively with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), key school districts and community-based child development programs to integrate a range of services, thereby supporting the effective:

- articulation between child development and kindergarten, including approaches to effectively engage parents in the education of their children,
- design of developmentally appropriate transitional kindergarten programs throughout the County, and
- identification and/or utilization of new/nontraditional funding for child development services such as, but not limited to, Federal Title 1 funds, to serve special populations.

#### Lessons Learned:

Children who experience poverty, abuse, neglect, parental substance abuse, mental illness, and/or exposure to violence are “at risk” for negative impacts on their physical and mental health. High quality child development programs that include family support services have proven to be an effective intervention for children and families in these circumstances.<sup>10</sup> The trajectory for high school graduation, employment, and economic self sufficiency is set in these very early years.

Some studies have shown that the cognitive benefits associated with high quality child development services can erode by third grade. Rather than trying to fix the blame for this “erosion of benefits” it may be more appropriate to identify how to effectively bridge the child development and public school systems for the purpose of sustaining these benefits. Such efforts would build on the intensity of relationships common in child development programs, while also enhancing

<sup>10</sup> *The Impact of Early Adversity on Children’s Development.* Center on the Developing Child, [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu).

the instructional support in these programs. When child development programs, transition kindergarten, kindergarten and elementary grades are viewed as a continuum rather than as separate entities, the likelihood of actually meeting the needs of individual children is increased.

Low-income working families, families involved with the child welfare system, and those struggling with homelessness, mental health, substance abuse, and/or domestic violence could all benefit from access to high quality child development services. Unfortunately, the supply of high quality subsidized child development services is dwarfed by the demand. While accessing these services can be complicated for any family, those without a fixed address or other challenges are at a serious disadvantage.

New resources are needed to expand the supply of high quality subsidized child development services for low-income working families and families experiencing trauma and to integrate family services into child development programs.

#### Success Story

The Packard Foundation and First 5 California are working with the Ounce of Prevention and The Buffet Early Education Fund to bring Educare to Los Angeles and Santa Clara. Under the leadership of LAUSD, a coalition is forming to plan and apply for the development of an Educare site in Los Angeles.

Educare is a network of state-of-the art child development centers operating full-day, full-year programs for children birth to five years of age. There are Educare sites in ten states, each serving from 140 to 200 low-income children and their families. These centers have highly qualified teaching staff in all classrooms, address a range of family service needs, and are actively engaged in research aimed at improving the practice in individual centers while also contributing new information to the field. Educare centers form a growing network committed to advancing quality and changing public policy in their own states and across the country.



## Strategies:

- The OCC and the Roundtable shall work in partnership with LACOE and key school districts to promote articulation between child development programs and grades K-3, and the establishment of developmentally appropriate transition kindergartens with effective parent engagement practices in school districts throughout the County.
- OCC and County departments will support the development of an Educare site in Los Angeles County and will promote co-location of County and other family services at the site.
- The Roundtable will work in partnership with DCFS, Probation, and other stakeholders to:
  - ✓ Engage the CDE/CDD in a dialogue regarding the potential long term impacts (physical, emotional and mental) of child abuse and neglect, and the role of high quality child development services to mitigate those impacts.
  - ✓ Explore regulatory or legislative remedies to facilitate access to high quality child development services for children determined to be at risk or who have experienced child abuse and/or neglect, including children who have been removed from their homes.
  - ✓ Identify and/or access new or nontraditional funding for child development services such as, but not limited to, Federal Title 1 and Title IVE Waiver funds, to serve special populations.

## Partners and Commitments:

- LACOE will work with local school districts to promote articulation between child development and K-3 systems and the use of Title 1 funds for early education services.

- LAUSD will expand Transition Kindergarten services designed to build the cognitive, social and emotional skills needed for school success.
- The Roundtable will convene representatives of the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and local child care resource and referral agencies to explore the use of child development settings for mental health services including but not limited to multidisciplinary team evaluations for children who are enrolled in child development programs.

### Success Stories

The Preschool Clinics are a part of LAUSD's commitment to "recognize and respond" to the unique needs of individual children. The clinics target children birth to five years of age and make an array of professionals available including school psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, nurses, audiometrists, and social workers. The clinics are held in preschool settings and all screenings are conducted with age appropriate tools. At the end of the clinic, families receive a written report, a toolkit of supporting materials, and have the opportunity to discuss follow-up options.

Beginning in April 2011, the Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles will launch an innovative seasonal flu vaccine outreach and distribution program serving the hardest-to-reach, most vulnerable populations, throughout Los Angeles County.

Alliance agencies will collaborate with Health Educators from DPH to develop vaccine health literacy materials and will create innovative trainings and workshops for parents and providers that are aimed at "re-norming" the community's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to vaccine-preventable illnesses. Further, the program is intended to create a "cocoon" of people in the lives of young children. When caregivers are protected from seasonal flu, the risk of serious flu illnesses are reduced for the children in their care.

**Goal Five:** The Chief Executive Office (CEO) will facilitate County department efforts to work internally, across departments, and with community partners, to integrate the Strengthening Families Approach (SFA) and Protective Factors into their work with children, families and communities; and engage families in high quality child development services. The CEO, with assistance from the Center for the Study of Social Policy and key local partners, will establish a multidisciplinary SFA learning community designed to support ongoing professional development and SFA projects that are underway or emerging in County departments.

### Lessons Learned:

As noted earlier in this document, SFA seeks to engage the programs, services, and systems that are already supporting and working with children and families as partners in both preventing maltreatment and promoting optimal development. Developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, SFA began as an approach to child abuse prevention which focused on children from birth to five years of age. This age group was targeted because it accounts for a significant proportion of children who experience abuse and/or neglect. This period of high risk for abuse is also a time of critical brain development in young children. Adverse experiences during these early years have the potential for lifelong negative impacts to both physical and mental health.

A number of federal government agencies and national and local foundations are actively engaged in the SFA and 33 states that have adopted the SFA are participating in the Strengthening Families National Network. The Director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Erwin McEwen, describes why Illinois has adopted this approach to promoting child safety and well-being:

*"We protect children when we strengthen and support families. Strengthening Families Illinois brings early education and child welfare professionals together not only to*

*prevent harm, but to build protective capacity in the place where it matters most: the family."*<sup>11</sup>

As in other parts of the county, young children, birth to five years of age account for a substantial portion (averaging 30 percent per month) of the open cases managed by the DCFS. Local philanthropies, community-based agencies and specific programs within some County departments, have adopted the SFA to serve children and families in Los Angeles County.

It is time to expand the commitment to SFA, including the five Protective Factors, from specific projects within various County departments, to a countywide commitment. Adoption of the SFA could provide a common language and approach to services across disciplines, County departments and community-based agencies. SFA could also facilitate coordination across diverse initiatives. Fortunately, the Center for the Study of Social Policy is prepared to provide guidance to County departments as we move forward in this endeavor. The Center for the Study of Social Policy will draw on the extensive experience of working with public and private entities around the country.

### Success Story

During 2009-2010, the OCC and LACOE-HS provided a full day of training on the SFA, early brain development, and the range of local child development resources available to families to nearly 300 Deputy Juvenile Probation Officers. This training supported the Probation Department's effort to adopt a "family engagement focus", modify their emerging "practice model" and implement the SFA. Working with the same collaborative partners, the Probation Department has identified a series of action steps to reinforce and expand the first year training activities.

<sup>11</sup> Strengthening Families Illinois E Update, January-February 2008 at [www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org).

## Success Stories

The DMH Birth to Five Program has infused the SFA and Protective Factors into the 0-5 Initial Assessment training that is required of all Birth to Five mental health providers. In addition, substantial efforts have been made with the DMH staff co-located at the DCFS offices to ensure inclusion of the approach in their work. Numerous other DMH and/or community agency sponsored trainings have similarly incorporated the role of the Protective Factors as part of trainings on multiple topics in the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health field that are designed for mental health providers, Head Start mental health consultants, early care and education providers, and representatives from other disciplines.

Evaluation of the Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP) funded by DCFS between 2008 and 2010 includes promising indications that Protective Factors can be enhanced through community-based social networking strategies that complement more intensive and expensive service strategies, and are effective across a broad range of families and communities. Findings from the Relationship-based Organizing Protective Factors Survey include responses from over 1000 parents and youth who participated in PIDP activities. Data collected from the survey and focus groups held in all eight Service Planning Areas (SPAs) highlighted the benefits that parents and youth felt they had received; those who participated in Neighborhood Action Councils and social networks reported a pattern of benefits including greater involvement in their community, more desire to engage in community activities, and feeling less lonely or isolated.

establishing a multidisciplinary learning community and convening multi-disciplinary professional development opportunities.

- Work collaboratively with First 5 LA, LAUP, the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment and other local entities to integrate work across County departments and among community stakeholders.
- Work collaboratively with the Education Coordinating Council and County Commissions to support departments in accessing child development services for their clients.
- Work collaboratively with First 5 LA in their place-based approach and countywide efforts to promote the SFA.

## Partners and Commitments:

- CEO/SIB/OCC will lead efforts to establish a SFA learning community involving County departments and community stakeholders with assistance from the Center for the Study of Social Policy.
- OCC will work collaboratively with County departments, First 5 LA and stakeholders such as the child care resource and referral agencies to inventory existing materials and organizational access to traditional and social media that could be used to inform parents of the critical importance of early brain development and the role of high quality child development services in supporting optimum brain development.
- The Roundtable to work collaboratively with CEO Public Information, Cable and Telecommunications to develop a coordinated public information campaign using the materials identified above and various forms of media.



## Strategies:

- Consistent with the CEO's mission to facilitate "effective program implementation", the OCC will work with the Center for the Study of Social Policy to promote the integration of the SFA into County department practices by



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Within the Service Integration Branch of the Chief Executive Office  
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**What We Know: *Families thrive when protective factors are robust in their lives and communities.***

Using the Strengthening Families Approach, more than 30 states are shifting policy, funding and training to help programs working with children and families build protective factors with families. Many states and counties also use the Protective Factors Framework to align services for children and families, strengthen families in the child welfare system and work in partnership with families and communities to build protective factors. For more information and many tools and options for implementation, visit [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net).

Nationally, Strengthening Families is coordinated by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) and supported by national partner organizations including:

- Child Welfare Information Gateway
- The Finance Project
- FRIENDS National Resource Center
- The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds
- Parents As Teachers
- United Way Worldwide
- ZERO TO THREE

## The Protective Factors Framework

Five Protective Factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families Approach: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. Research studies support the common-sense notion that when these Protective Factors are well established in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes. Research shows that these protective factors are also "promotive" factors that build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child and youth development.

### Parental Resilience

No one can eliminate stress from parenting, but a parent's capacity for resilience can affect how a parent deals with stress. Resilience is the ability to manage and bounce back from all types of challenges that emerge in every family's life. It means finding ways to solve problems, building and sustaining trusting relationships including relationships with your own child, and knowing how to seek help when necessary.

### Social Connections

Friends, family members, neighbors and community members provide emotional support, help solve problems, offer parenting advice and give concrete assistance to parents. Networks of support are essential to parents and also offer opportunities for people to "give back", an important part of self-esteem as well as a benefit for the community. Isolated families may need extra help in reaching out to build positive relationships.

### Concrete Support in Times of Need

Meeting basic economic needs like food, shelter, clothing and health care is essential for families to thrive. Likewise, when families encounter a crisis such as domestic violence, mental illness or substance abuse, adequate services and supports need to be in place to provide stability, treatment and help for family members to get through the crisis.

### Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children's behavior at every age help parents see their children and youth in a positive light and promote their healthy development. Information can come from many sources, including family members as well as parent education classes and surfing the internet. Studies show information is most effective when it comes at the precise time parents need it to understand their own children. Parents who experienced harsh discipline or other negative childhood experiences may need extra help to change the parenting patterns they learned as children.

### Social and Emotional Competence of Children

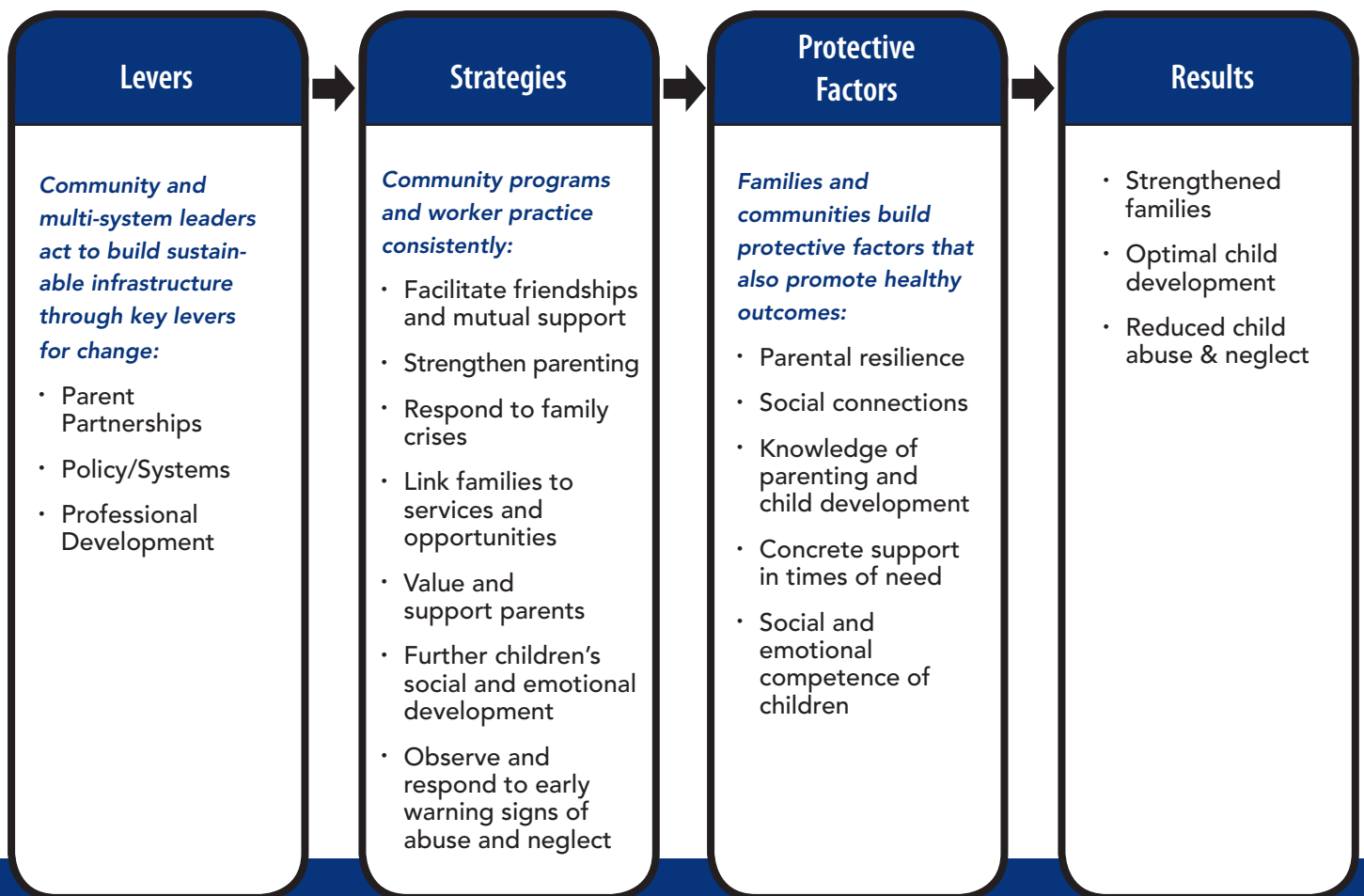
A child or youth's ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults, and peers. Challenging behaviors or delayed development create extra stress for families, so early identification and assistance for both parents and children can head off negative results and keep development on track.

Mobilizing partners, communities and families  
to build family strengths, promote optimal  
development and reduce child abuse and neglect

## Strengthening Families: Creating a New Normal

### The Strengthening Families Approach:

- Benefits ALL families
- Builds on family strengths, buffers risk, and promotes better outcomes
- Can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions
- Builds on and can become a part of existing programs, strategies, systems and community opportunities
- Is grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge



### A New Normal

Families and communities, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on building protective and promotive factors to reduce risk and create optimal outcomes for children, youth and families
- Recognize and support parents as decision makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families